



## *The President's Daily Brief*

22 May 1972

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*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY*

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

22 May 1972

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The apparent demotion of politburo member Shelest strengthens pro-detente forces in the Soviet leadership. (Page 1)

In the Vietnam fighting, a series of Communist attacks against South Vietnamese positions in the coastal Quang Tri - Thua Thien border area were repulsed with the help of allied air strikes and naval gunfire. The enemy buildup around Hue continues. (Page 2)

North Vietnamese editorialists are mixing dire warnings and high praise about the support of Hanoi's allies abroad. (Page 3)

The Egyptians have again displayed their misgivings about Soviet policy in the Middle East and their concern over the summit. (Page 4)

Egyptian President Sadat has moved against political opponents who recently submitted a petition critical of his policies. (Page 5)

The way has been cleared for West German President Heinemann to sign the law ratifying the Eastern treaties tomorrow. (Page 6)

Lao Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma has stymied an effort by rightists to force the resignation of his government. (Page 6)

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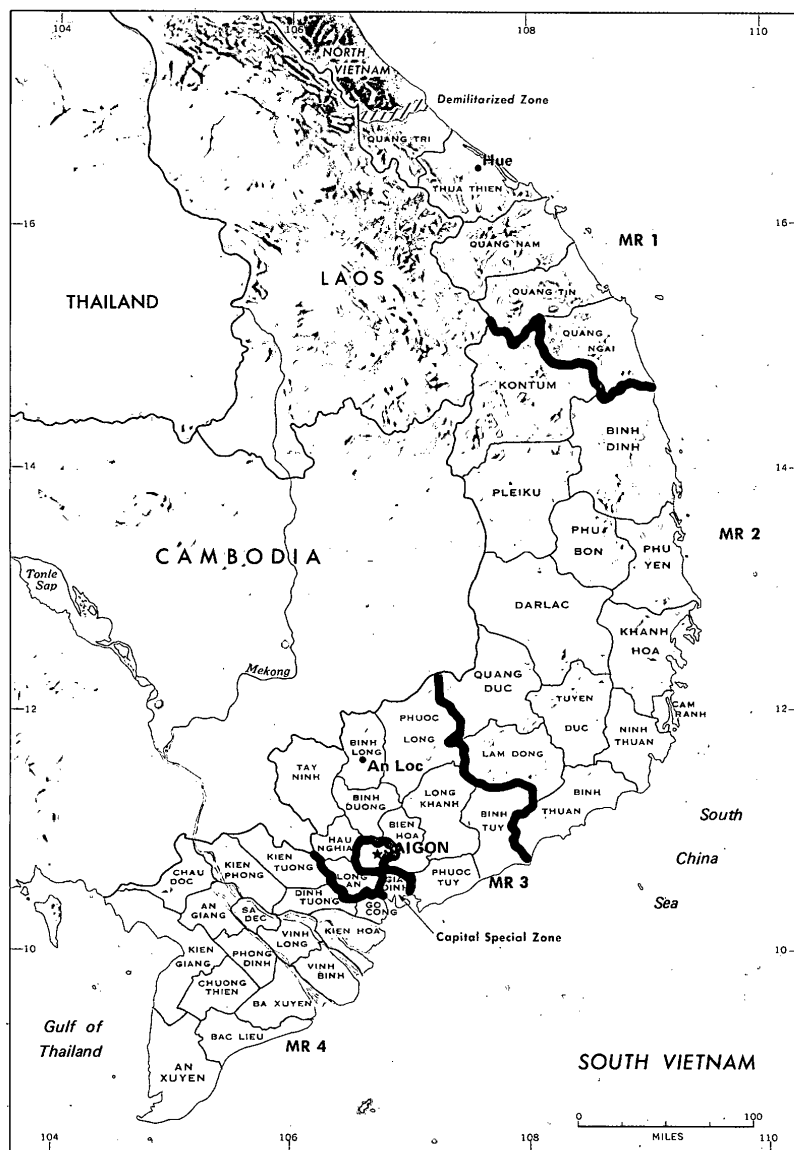
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USSR

Politburo member Petr Shelest has been appointed to the relatively unimportant post of deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers.

*This move is probably the first step in a demotion process. The fact that the appointment was announced following the Central Committee plenum that unanimously endorsed Brezhnev's detente policy on 19 May suggests that Shelest lost out in the debate over foreign policy. He has been an outspoken critic of detente, and the US Embassy in Moscow reports that he is rumored to have pushed for cancellation of the summit meeting after President Nixon's speech on Vietnam on 8 May. The move against Shelest may also have been given a boost by the West German ratification of the Eastern treaties. In any event, his demotion strengthens those favoring detente and increases somewhat Brezhnev's room to maneuver.*

*Shelest almost certainly will lose his position as Ukrainian first secretary, which would cut him off from his provincial power base. Although he may be able to retain his politburo membership for some time, Shelest is likely to be less influential in his new position. He joins eight other deputy chairmen of the Council of Ministers--none of whom has politburo status--and is outranked on the council by Chairman Kosygin and two first deputy chairmen who are full members of the politburo.*



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### SOUTH VIETNAM

The Communists carried out a series of tank-led attacks against South Vietnamese positions in the coastal Quang Tri - Thua Thien border area on 21 May, but were turned back with the help of heavy allied air strikes and naval gunfire.

*The attacks apparently were made to discourage further South Vietnamese counter-attacks into Communist-occupied Quang Tri Province. Recent intercepts have reflected the enemy's growing concern about such government operations and suggest that the Communists have been forced to divert men and equipment to strengthen their defensive positions.*

The enemy still appears to be pressing ahead with preparations to attack Hue. A recent intercept called for increased harassment of government forces in other provinces in order to keep South Vietnamese reinforcements from being sent to the Hue area. The North Vietnamese also appear to be increasing their forces around the city. The 36th Regiment of the 308th Division has moved south toward Fire Support Base Bastogne, putting it near the 324B Division and its three infantry regiments. Another regiment of the 308th may also be moving south toward this area.

In the fighting around An Loc, South Vietnamese forces have turned back yet another enemy attack on the relief column moving slowly toward the town.

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NORTH VIETNAM

North Vietnamese editorialists are mixing dire warnings and high praise about the support of Hanoi's allies abroad. A "commentator" article published in the official army newspaper on 21 May directs invective at President Nixon that is meant to make those "socialists" who might be considering dealing with him as uncomfortable as possible. On the same day, however, Hanoi's regular daily newspaper took a completely different line, expressing the regime's profound gratitude for the support of its allies, explicitly the Soviet Union. The paper also points out that North Vietnam has awarded posthumous citations to the Soviet sailors who, Hanoi charges, were killed in recent US air strikes.

*Much of Hanoi's domestic audience may well regard such contradictory press play with puzzlement, but the regime undoubtedly is less concerned with reaction on the home front than with that of the Soviets. The North Vietnamese leaders appear to be trying to underscore their concern about a possible slackening of Soviet support as a result of the Moscow summit, without giving public offense to the Soviets. Moreover, by emphasizing Soviet casualties and damage to Soviet ships, Hanoi doubtless hopes to put pressure on Kremlin leaders before Soviet and world opinion.*

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## EGYPT-USSR

The Egyptians have again displayed their misgivings about Soviet policy in the Middle East and their concern over the summit. On Friday, the semi-official Egyptian newspaper, al-Ahram, published an account of a forum on the Moscow summit that reflected criticism of the USSR as well as the US. The meeting's primary theme was worry that the Middle East would be a low priority topic at Moscow.

Egyptian Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Ismail Fahmy blamed the US and USSR jointly for the Arab-Israeli deadlock and said the impasse could not be broken without their participation. He warned the Soviets that they would be making a major miscalculation if they thought the Arab states would accept a no-war, no-peace policy. Other participants spoke in a similar vein. One stated bluntly that Moscow prefers the no-war, no-peace situation, while another complained that US obligations to its friends in the area are stronger than those of Moscow to its clients.

*Cairo views the US-USSR discussion as one of its few hopes for breaking the deadlock with Israel and is deeply concerned that other issues will take priority. Egyptian suspicion that Soviet interests in the Middle East are primarily self-serving has been aired before, but not at this level. Egyptian officials may hope that publication of this dialogue will provide a warning to Moscow not to bargain away Arab interests at the summit. Domestically, the article serves as another assertion of national independence designed to dampen criticism of the regime's close ties with the Soviet Union.*

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EGYPT

On 17 May, Egyptian security authorities arrested a number of persons associated with former vice-president Zakariya Muhyeddin, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Other prominent Egyptians [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] have been put under house arrest. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

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*The arrests reflect a decision by President Sadat to move against political opponents who recently submitted a petition critical of his policies. Sadat suspects Muhyeddin of inspiring the petition even though he did not sign it. The petition criticized "excessive" Egyptian reliance on the USSR and called for the formation of a national front to supercede Egypt's established institutions. In referring to the petition in a speech on 14 May, Sadat warned that anyone attempting to establish such an organization would be punished.*

*Sadat's actions against critics of his relationship with the USSR may have been partly intended for Moscow's benefit. Muhyeddin is believed to command considerable respect from Egypt's military leadership and this may have deterred Sadat from moving against him directly.*

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NOTES

West Germany: The way has been cleared for President Heinemann to sign the law ratifying the Eastern treaties tomorrow. The constitutional court on Friday refused to accept challenges brought by two individuals against the treaties and a key Bavarian official involved in the legal preparations of another possible appeal has said flatly that his state government would not seek a court ruling on the treaties.

Laos: On Friday, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma stymied a challenge from rightists in the National Assembly when their resolution calling for his government's resignation failed to come to a vote. Two new resolutions were introduced providing for the maintenance of Souvanna's government with some minor changes. Most politicians now appear to favor some face-saving compromise. The ouster resolution was promoted by the powerful Sananikone family, which had been pressing Souvanna to fire his minister of finance. Souvanna also continues to refuse to fill portfolios held open for the Lao Communists under the Geneva Accords of 1962 in order to maintain a framework for their future participation.

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